

Message Text

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17

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 IO-14 OMB-01 EB-11 COME-00 AGR-20 DRC-01 /136 W

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R 140625Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3177

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE CANBERRA 2872

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, AS, CK

SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM DENIES AUSTRALIA INTENDS TO TURN
CHRISTMAS ISLAND OVER TO SINGAPORE

REF: CANBERRA 1552

1. AUSTRALIAN PRESS MAY 10 CARRIED REPORTS FROM SINGAPORE THAT AUSTRALIA HAD REACHED AN AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE TO TURN CHRISTMAS ISLAND OVER TO SINGAPORE. REACTING TO NEWS WITH SOMEWHAT SURPRISING HEAT, PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM ANNOUNCED TO PRESS MAY 13 THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO AGREEMENT ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE ISLAND AND NO SECRET DEAL, AS ALLEGED IN PRESS.

2. WHITLAM SAID THAT SINGAPORE PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW RAISED THE QUESTION OF CHRISTMAS ISLAND WITH HIM DURING TALKS IN FEBRUARY, 1974, BUT STATED THERE WAS NO DISCUSSION IN ANY DETAIL. WHITLAM SAID AUSTRALIAN SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE ISLAND WAS NOT IN QUESTION.

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3. THE SHARP TONE OF WHITLAM'S DENIAL WAS PRESUMABLY A

CONSEQUENCE OF COMMENTS BY LIBERAL-COUNTRY OPPOSITION LEADERS ON THE MATTER. LIBERAL DEFENSE SPOKESMAN A. J. FORBES SAID THERE WAS PRIMA FACIE CASE THAT WHITLAM INTENDED TO HAND OVER CHRISTMAS ISLAND TO SINGAPORE, WHILE DEPUTY COUNTRY PARTY LEADER SINCLAIR SAID THE REPORTED AGREEMENT EQUALLED THE GAIR AFFAIR FOR ITS SHABBINESS AND SAID THE DISCUSSIONS WITH SINGAPORE FLOUTED THE CONCEPT OF THE LIBERATION OF COLONIAL PEOPLE.

4. COMMENT: CHRISTMAS ISLAND WAS ADMINISTERED BY SINGAPORE (AND ITS PREDECESSOR, THE STRAITS SETTLEMENTS) FROM 1900 TO 1958, WHEN IT WAS TURNED OVER TO AUSTRALIA. ITS PRINCIPAL RESOURCE, PHOSPHATE FERTILIZER, IS OF INTEREST IN A FERTILIZER-HUNGRY WORLD. THE EXCHANGE BETWEEN WHITLAM AND THE OPPOSITION ABOUT THE FUTURE OF CHRISTMAS ISLAND IS PERHAPS MOST NOTABLE AS HAVING BEEN ONE OF THE FEW REFERENCES TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS ISSUES IN THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN. END COMMENT.
GREEN

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Message Attributes

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